



AGRICULTURAL
RETAILERS
ASSOCIATION

**Testimony of
AGRICULTURAL RETAILERS ASSOCIATION**

on

“Review of the Impact of Asian Soybean Rust on the U.S. Farm Sector”

before

**Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development & Research
Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities & Risk Management
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives**

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INTRODUCTION

The Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA), which represents the retail sector of the U.S. agriculture industry, thanks House Agriculture Subcommittee Chairmen Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Frank Lucas (R-OK) for holding this joint hearing and allowing ARA to provide our views on the issue of Asian Soybean Rust in the United States. ARA represents America's crop input dealers who own and operate about 6,000 U.S. retail outlets and provide crop input materials to America's farmers.

I am the Vice President of Regulatory Affairs & Corporate Relations for the ARA, in Washington, DC. During the past 35 years in the agricultural industry, I have held various executive management, marketing, sales, and association positions. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Agronomy from California State Polytechnic University and a diverse background in U S Agriculture. I have coordinated extensive support programs with industry groups, food groups, not-for-profit commodity organizations, agricultural consultants, and farm management investors. Currently, I serve on the DHS Food and Agriculture Committee as the industry representative for the Input sub-council. Previously I have managed agricultural affairs at both the Federal and State levels in the private sector.

ARA and member companies understand this disease threat to America's soybean industry. We have been both monitoring the progression of this disease as well as being proactive in our communications with the agricultural retail and distribution industry. I will divide my brief comments into three key parts:

- 1) Pest Awareness and identification (discovery, disease life cycle, fungicide selection and application timing);
- 2) Commercial issues (equipment availability, product distribution); and
- 3) Industry involvement (ongoing discussions with industry partners).

PEST AWARENESS AND IDENTIFICATION

With the rapid spread and devastating impact of the Asian Soybean Rust problem in South America, the question was really not if but when it would arrive at our nation's doorstep. The first signs of this disease appearing in farmers' fields occurred late last year. As a first step in being proactive on this critical issue, ARA invited Burleson Smith, USDA Special Assistant Pest Management Policy, to attend the ARA's annual convention and conference in December 2004. Mr. Smith addressed the open session with comments directed at creating more industry awareness on soybean rust.

ARA provided USDA a complimentary booth area for dissemination of USDA rust leaflets to the hundreds of industry representatives from across the nation in attendance. Retailers were directed to discuss with Mr. Smith disease specific issues and take home literature with background information on the disease and key steps that could be taken to mitigate the problem. Open dialogue between ARA and USDA concerning soybean rust developments has and will continue. ARA members have been provided guidance where they could obtain more background from government web sites and industry sites on Asian Soybean Rust. An enormous campaign of training and awareness has occurred at the local level before the pest has even impacted yields, probably more training and information dissemination has occurred for this pest than has ever been done in U.S. history.

Commercial Issues

ARA has been and continues to be supportive in advising our members to work closely with local soybean producers and include local experts on rust disease such as Ag extension agents and university research experts. Many ARA member have their own agronomy staff that are becoming proficient in disease discovery techniques as well as the disease life cycle in order to spot disease symptoms. ARA has encouraged members to become well versed in all of the current disease control products available and systems including all current Integral Pest Management (IPM) programs appropriate for the control of soybean rust. This knowledge will greatly facilitate a rapid response after initial disease discovery. Included in this process is the selection of the best fungicide materials for disease control, and the appropriate product sourcing routes from either manufacturers or distributors. ARA asks the committee to review the option of using retailers as first responders under the Technical Service Provider (TSP) program administered by USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS). The TSP program was established by Congress as a public private partnership in the 2002 Farm Bill to assist USDA officials with field tasks at an efficiency rate equal to or better than present systems. As program participants, retailers could become an extension of USDA officials in discovery of soybean rust, since agricultural retailers truly are the bridge between science and the soil. Over 90% of America's farmers rely on their local agricultural retailer as their primary source of agronomic technical information. To be considered a first responder and included in the TSP program an agricultural professional should hold at least one of the following certifications: Certified Crop Advisor, Certified Professional Crop Professional, Certified Professional Agronomist, or a similar or related certification.

ARA as an association and ARA members have written countless articles and held numerous meetings to educate our farmer customers on the best management practices for disease control. ARA has supported and encouraged retailers to participate in on-line seminars with the countries leading experts to provide front line information to growers. ARA has also written in a question and answer format several newsletter stories to assist our members with key concepts that retailers will need to know to combat this new threat.

Questions for retailers to consider include:

- Do you already have enough equipment to deliver fungicide control at the proper timing to the target crop?
- Have you reviewed equipment for agronomic crop fit, i.e. will a late season fungicide application hurt the crop from the physical damage caused by the equipment?
- Have you calculated breakeven trigger points for justifying disease control costs, and held appropriate discussions with your farmers?
- Have you discussed soybean rust issues with your soybean growers to ensure a short learning curve if an outbreak occurs?
- Have you secured supplies of product from your distributors if an outbreak occurs? Have you discussed higher credit lines with customers who are potential users of a new soybean fungicide product?
- Are you taking key IPM steps to be good environmental stewards and neighbors?
- Are you recommending drift management materials to be good stewards and avoid chemical trespass?

ARA has encouraged retailers to consider these as well as other questions with their local soybean farmers.

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

ARA has discussed agronomic and application practices with several national organizations to better understand the role of cooperation that will be needed should a major disease outbreak occur. For example, ARA has reviewed options and ideas on rust with executives of the American Soybean Association, and we are working together to ensure that any disease outbreak is not only handled efficiently, but also handled with the most economical control system possible. ARA realizes that soybean rust adds an entirely new cost and management dimension for soybean producers, and as an industry we are fully committed to make this potential problem as worry free as possible. America's crop protection retailers will continue to work closely with their customers as well as fungicide suppliers to keep America's food supply safe, abundant, and economical.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I thank the committee for allowing ARA to participate in this hearing and having the foresight in dealing with this new threat to American agriculture. If ARA can be of any further service we are ready to assist.